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SUBJECT: A WALK THROUGH DAKAR UNIVERSITY: THE STUDENTS SPEAK

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Summary

1. (SBU) In a series of interviews conducted with University of Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) students from all disciplines, student leaders, and university professors concerning their political views and their educational experience, "Failing exams is the rule" and "Success is the exception" was an oft-repeated refrain. With living and learning conditions reminiscent of a prison, a once politically active student body has become increasingly torpid. End Summary.

Voting Behavior of Students

2. (SBU) A mixture of shiny cufflinks, 2pac and Jay-Z T-shirts, and African fabrics whirled back and forth in crowded hallways as students come and go from massive corkboards displaying end of term results. The semester is roaring to a close at a decrepit UCAD, where over 55,000 students attend a facility originally designed for 15,000.

3. (SBU) While asserting a certain political impotence, many students affirmed that they now use their vote as the primary tool for political change instead of protests, pickets, and sometime violent marches. Since President Wade came to power they have transformed their political strategy whereby they are now trying to work with and within the system, rather than outside and against it. Some students explained that this stance was driven out of fear of a regime which, they claim, was not above throwing people in jail for disagreeing with it. One female student leader blamed the passivity of the Senegalese people and opposition parties for the country's failures. She believes that people are too fearful of Wade and the PDS to fight for change. At a recent meeting during a rally, the student leader recalled how she told the opposition leaders that they were all "cowards".

Views of Wade's Administration

4. (SBU) Political affiliations were diverse, and many students noted a change in their peers' attitudes from a traditional sense of solidarity to a strong new sense of individualism. By and large, students chose not to affiliate themselves with a political party so they could be "fundamentally free." According to them, party affiliations require you to wholeheartedly support the party line, whether or not you agree with it. Speaking against your own party is betrayal. This is similar with religious affiliations, as a student leader explained: "Even if I disagree with what the Democratic Party of Senegal (PDS) is doing I could not go against my marabout, and he supported Wade."

5. (SBU) Whether the students supported President Wade or not, they all agreed that both the educational system and the general governance of the country were not working. All of them cited rising living costs, the lack of job opportunities, and the horrid learning conditions at UCAD as key problems. Those supporting the

President believe that democratic ideals were thriving and saw potential in their leader. Those disagreeing contend that the system is not transparent and democratic ideals have given way to the misuse of resources by those in power. PDS supporters are united in their belief that Wade is acting in the best interests of students and that the party cares for their needs. They cite donations of computers and the building of a new library as evidence. Others see Wade's regime as a failure, saying that their verbal support of education seldom materializes into concrete actions. Dissenters cite the lack of desks and chairs at the new library and the cramped dorms, made for two, with eight students living on top of one another.

A Monarchy in the Making?

16. (SBU) When asked whether or not they believed Wade was preparing for the succession of his son Karim, many students felt that this was "impossible." "This isn't a monarchy," said almost every respondent, making it clear that students believe Wade had only a limited margin of error before he butts up against the backlash of the people. During a roundtable discussion with eight English students, the topic of Karim sent the students into frenzy with many agreeing Wade is setting stage for his son's rise, but also contending that he will have to be elected into office like anyone else.

Where the future lies

17. (SBU) No matter the political affiliation, every student agreed that there is hope for of Senegal. One student contended that "Senegal has a future, for those that work". Though the present trend is considered grim, students believe in their own potential. A student called for an "awakening" in order for the Senegalese to reduce the level of corruption in government and politics, and to begin working for the people. The students are eager to serve their country and to promote the welfare of Senegal; however only if they can find a job.

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Comment

18. (SBU) The PDS party seems to be doing enough to pacify and the students and teachers, but not enough to improve their situation, exposing them to a vicious cycle seemingly designed for failure. They seem eager to see their country change and, while they desire to make their lives in Senegal, they bemoan the lack of resources and opportunities to accomplish their goals.

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